

2007



Long Term Care Issues

Testimony

**Public Health Committee
Wednesday, February 14, 2007**

Feeding Assistants

***The Office of the State Long Term Care
Ombudsman Program***



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Good Morning members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Nancy Shaffer and I am the State Long Term Care Ombudsman. As you are aware, the Ombudsman Program is mandated to comment on legislative proposals and to bring systemic concerns to the attention of this General Assembly.

I am here today to speak to you on behalf of the numerous individuals who reside in our State's skilled nursing facilities who are unable to independently feed themselves.

The issue of feeding nursing home residents inadvertently became a topic of discussion at the 2006 VOICES Forum. During one portion of the Forum a President of the Resident Council of one of the skilled nursing facilities stated how sad she is when she observes people who need to be fed and are not getting the help that they need.

Interestingly, though also very sad, the topic of feeding residents arose during discussions about fear of retaliation. The Forum was divided into two groups for the purpose of discussing fear of retaliation, one group made up of nursing home staff who had accompanied the residents to the Forum and the other group was residents only. Both groups, independent of one another, identified not feeding a resident as a form of retaliation.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program has identified feeding nursing home residents as a primary issue and worthy of much further investigation and development of recommendations and remedies to alleviate this form of negligence and abuse.

In 2003, the federal government published final rules on "feeding assistants" in skilled nursing facilities. The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program supports proposed legislation for

Feeding Assistants in skilled nursing facilities, so long as strict and appropriate guidelines are set forth for the curriculum, training, and job description of the Feeding Assistant. Criteria and monitoring of change of condition for residents to be fed by Feeding Assistants must be established. Suitable facility policies and procedures must be monitored for strict enforcement. While feeding assistants with proper training and extensive oversight and supervision by a licensed nurse, registered dietitian and a speech pathologist may be a part of the answer to good nutrition and hydration of skilled nursing residents, the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program anticipates that this is not the complete solution to this problem. As one experienced long term care Registered Dietician has stated, "all the opportunities to feed and hydrate residents during the 24 hour day must be addressed."

Therefore, the Ombudsman Program supports the following proposed legislation if safeguards are written into the language, which address the above concerns. Proposed S.B. No. 91 An Act Allowing Nursing Homes To Establish Training Programs For Feeding Assistants